

VZCZCXYZ9881
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSP #0111 0661145
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 061145Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9022
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3754
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RHMCSUU/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL//HQ USSOUTHCOM JS MIAMI FL

UNCLAS PORT OF SPAIN 000111

SIPDIS

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR WHA/CAR
STATE PASS USTR FOR KENT SHIGETOMI
USDOC/ITA/MAC/OFFICE OF LATIN AMERICA CARIBBEAN
DOE FOR OFFICE OF POLICY AND INT'L AFFAIRS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [EFIS](#) [EPET](#) [ETRD](#) [BB](#) [TD](#)

SUBJECT: NEW BARBADOS PM DISCUSSES FISH, CSME, REGIONAL TRANSPORT
DURING VISIT TO TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The Prime Ministers of Barbados and Trinidad & Tobago used their February 20 meeting in Port of Spain to reverse perceptions that bilateral relations have deteriorated in recent years, making optimistic statements about resolving their fisheries dispute, holding dialogue on the CARICOM Single Market and Economy, and voicing common concerns with Venezuela's PetroCaribe initiative.
END Summary.

¶2. (U) During his February 20 visit to Trinidad, new Barbados PM David Thompson met with Prime Minister Manning to discuss bilateral fisheries negotiations, the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), energy and transport cooperation. Thompson also met briefly with political opposition leader Basdeo Panday.

¶3. (U) After his meeting with Thompson, Manning told reporters that a fisheries agreement could be concluded within the next year, following a technical report on flying fish stocks that is due within a month. For his part, Thompson indicated a willingness to engage with the Tobago fishing community in the future.

¶4. (U) The two leaders affirmed their commitment to the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) and suggested holding a dialogue on the integration scheme on the margins of the next meeting of CARICOM Heads, March 7-8, to allow newly elected CARICOM leaders to benefit from the perspectives of their longer serving counterparts.

¶5. (U) Manning and Thompson also discussed regional transport, including prospects for T&T to launch a regional ferry service and the possibility of T&T-based Caribbean Airlines expanding service within the region.

¶6. (U) On energy, Thompson reaffirmed Barbados' stance on PetroCaribe. The two PMs recognized that short-term financial incentives have attracted other Caribbean countries to PetroCaribe, but they voiced concern over the implications for those countries' long-term debt burdens. Manning also briefed on the status of the Eastern Caribbean Gas Pipeline project, under which a pipeline currently being run to Tobago would be extended to Barbados and several OECS countries.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Manning and Thompson used this visit to send the message that bilateral relations, that had deteriorated under former Barbados Prime Minister Owen Arthur, were now on an upswing. Thompson's nod to the Tobago fishing community was politically astute, as the fisheries dispute continues to provoke anger on

Trinidad's sister island. More significant for the region's future, resentment over the success of T&T companies in penetrating other CARICOM members' markets -- which former PM Arthur voiced at last July's CARICOM Summit -- had raised questions about the level of political support for CSME. Business contacts in T&T are taking some comfort from Thompson's call for dialogue on CSME, noting that it coincides with news that Barbados' authorities will permit T&T conglomerate Neal & Massey to proceed with a takeover bid for Barbados Shipping & Transport. End Comment.

AUSTIN